

New 'army' organizing for cleanups; Former Fondren Division head leading efforts

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They may not have to rise and shine before dawn, but leaders, residents and students from Houston communities, businesses, churches and schools may soon find they are — at least once a year — volunteers in the Houston Police Department's newest army.

Assistant Chief Brian Lumpkin, who heads the police department's Neighborhood Protection Division, said the division's "neighborhood corps" will organize a massive army-style cleanup involving various city departments, probationers and volunteers in each of the City Council District areas one day a year.

"One special day in each council member's district, starting in March, we'd deploy at the park and employ as many resources as we can," Lumpkin said. "Super Neighborhoods may be the captains." Lumpkin said the idea still had to have the blessing of the Houston City Council, but he hoped the first City Council Cleanup — the "C-3" — could begin as early as March and involve as many volunteers from each district as possible.

He got the idea after several neighborhood civic associations joined volunteers from the city, area schools and faith-based institutions to clean up Moody Park in March, then enjoyed hot dogs and a raffle afterward in the park's pavilion. "We'd work as a corps, a small army," he said. He has been helping to reorganize Neighborhood Protection as a corps, he said, since he was appointed to the post about three months ago, when the program was moved from the city to the police department.

Lumpkin said his experience working with the strong Fondren area community in southwest Houston as the former head of the police department's Fondren Division, as well as his relationships with city and police departments, helped prepare him for his new tasks. Neighborhood Protection and its 145 employees, including inspectors, contract compliance specialists and hearing officers, are "committed, competent people," he said. Still, Lumpkin said there's room for improvement in the area of customer services.

He found that field inspectors were checking on complaints in specific ZIP codes or beats, leaving 3-1-1 calls to be worked on as the inspector's schedule and case load permitted. Lumpkin said he chose to institute a more proactive approach. His "corps" also focuses on dangerous buildings, including those with weeded lots, near churches or schools, removing illegal signs in neighborhoods, graffiti abatement, illegal dumping and giving inspectors more face-to-face contact when they check on city code issues.

Violations of the city's "no-tolerance" approach to getting rid of heavy trash on — and not before — heavy trash collection days can result in fines ranging from \$50 to \$2,000, said Donald Perkins, city liaison for Super Neighborhoods. Perkins is helping the city

launch its Stop Trashing Houston campaign, which includes public education, tougher enforcement of trash disposal regulations and more neighborhood participation.

A key part of the campaign, Perkins said, will be to provide neighborhood civic groups with new door hanger notices to pass out. The notices concern trash pickup dates, and are available in English and Spanish. Door hangers can be obtained at the city of Houston Multi-Service Centers or at City Hall, 611 Walker, sixth floor, or by calling 3-1-1, he said.